



MACK BOLAN

**THE
EXECUTIONER**

Commemorating the publication of
the 100th Executioner
Novel

BOLAN

A Brief History



**Mack Bolan,
The Executioner,
hits the mark
in his 100th
enemy-crushing mission.**

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Mack Bolan's beginnings were completely and monotonously normal. Bolan loved his parents and his siblings, did his best in school, and a perusal of his records indicates that Bolan achieved excellence in both athletics and the academic subjects.

Some editorials ascribe the Bolan "change" in Vietnam, but they have missed the fundamental fact that Bolan never really changed. At seventeen, when thousands of his peers were burning draft cards and departing for Canada, Mack Bolan joined the Special Forces grudgingly, anxious for the opportunity to serve his country in her hour of need. He had examined both sides of the controversy raging over Vietnam and finally decided for himself that Communist aggression posed a clear and present danger to the free society that he loved. For Bolan, personal involvement in the struggle was a duty that he could not, *would not*, avoid.

In Vietnam, the high school football star became a different kind of hero. As leader of a long-range penetration team, he drew the rugged missions other fighting men might not be able to perform. In time, his expertise in singling out and liquidating enemy commanders earned Mack Bolan his enduring reputation as the Executioner. A psychiatric profile prepared at the end of his first duty tour described Bolan as "the perfect sniper," capable of killing "coolly, unemotionally and *personally*," when the target's face was life-size in the eyepiece of his twenty-power telescopic sight. While other snipers burned out quickly, Mack Bolan registered a score of ninety-seven kills without apparent damage to his soul or psyche.

There was yet another side to Sergeant Bolan, evidenced on the occasions when he risked his life to help the wounded and the suffering, both military or civilian, carrying their broken bodies

through the lines in search of aid. In certain quarters, over time, one nickname was supplanted by another, and the Executioner also became known as "Sergeant Mercy." It is a measure of the man that his commitment to a cause, a bright ideal, was never tarnished by the jungle rot, corruption and incessant mayhem that surrounded him on every side.

Both aspects of the Bolan character were evident when he embarked upon a different sort of war, this time at home. Confronted with irrefutable evidence that mankind's evil hordes were preying on American society, escaping punishment through gaping loopholes in the system, Bolan saw his duty and he did not hesitate. If the police and courts could not inhibit organized extortion, traffic in narcotics, murder and intimidation by a secret brotherhood of criminals, there might be something that a dedicated, single-minded Executioner could do about the problem. If the rulers of the syndicate appeared to be above the law's constraints, they were not bulletproof, and Bolan's country had provided him with all the education and skills he needed to conduct a sweeping private war against the malefactors.

From the beginning, Bolan's war appeared unwinnable, a suicidal gesture of defiance in the face of powers far beyond the reach of any single man. Besides the legion of his enemies, the soldier faced determined opposition from police, a handicap increased by Bolan's personal decision to refrain from harming any law enforcement officer, not even if it meant his life.

Incredibly, against all odds, the Executioner emerged victorious from his initial confrontation with the Mafia. Police and the media had been predicting Bolan's death from the beginning, but the lessons of guerrilla warfare learned in Vietnam had served him well, as they would in months and years to come, when Bolan's holy war progressed from tabloid headlines to become the stuff of legend.

One faction of the government was anxious to assist the Executioner, absorb him and direct his energy toward other predetermined targets. Subtle offers were advanced, and each in turn was not so subtly rejected. Years of fire and blood would pass before Mack Bolan joined the government's clandestine teams, and in the meantime he would face the legions of the syndicate alone... or nearly so.

Inevitably Bolan's personal crusade attracted others—some professional combatants like himself, some inexperienced civilians motivated by concern or simple curiosity. Within the field of law enforcement, Bolan had his covert allies, men and women who had recognized that he was neither renegade nor wild-eyed vigilante. As the opportunity arose, they would support him with intelligence, with force or simply by avoiding contact, giving Bolan time and space to do his job without unnecessary interruptions. Meanwhile, covert allies in the press conveyed Mack Bolan's message to the world.

It was a simple message, simply stated. Every man and woman has the opportunity to make a difference in the quality of human life. Each human being has a choice: to stand for something decent or to kneel before the rising tide of anarchy and so be swept away. Despite the ancient stories that insist city hall, the syndicate or the establishment are impotent, impervious to change, a single man or woman can reverse the course of history. Determination is the key, accompanied by courage and a willingness to sacrifice.

As for Mack Bolan, he had grown accustomed to the pain of sacrifice, familiar with the risk of loss of life that faced a soldier each time he took the field against his enemies. The faces of his martyred friends and allies were eternally emblazoned in Bolan's memory, ever with him as he went about the business of his war. Their blood was heavy on his soul, and he could not forget the price that had been paid to keep his war machine in motion.

The myth of Mafia omnipotence was international in scope. The syndicate was everywhere, all-seeing, and a fugitive from underworld revenge would find no place on earth to hide. The crucial difference was that Bolan did not hide; he sought his adversaries out by dark or daylight, on the public street, and dealt his death hand with the cool aplomb of an experienced professional. It was the mobster's turn to understand that Mother Earth might not supply a hiding place, that death might be inevitable.

It was a lesson infinitely overdue, and Bolan drove it home with fire and steel as he scourged the enemy and left them scattered, leaderless.

In time, when the illicit empire of the Mafia had been reduced to chaos, local warlords feuding with each other, the soldier reconsidered offers of a secret pardon and a position with the government.

A worldwide rash of terrorism called for special handling, and Bolan was an expert when it came to dealing with the enemy from strength. If democratic governments were hamstrung by their own concern for civil rights and legal process, no such fine distinctions plagued the Executioner. His methods were simplicity itself: identify the adversary, isolate the target for protection of the innocent, then ruthlessly annihilate the enemy. Aggressive violence was the only language terrorists appeared to understand, and Bolan spoke their language fluently.

With covert government support, the Bolan war went international, depriving terrorists of sanctuaries that had previously granted them invincibility. In South America, Africa, Asia and the Middle East, practitioners of random violence learned that they were not immune from pain, or sudden death. There was a price for wreaking havoc on society, and it was payable in blood, upon the Executioner's demand.

In war, success or failure may be measured in a wide variety of ways. The Phoenix Project, led by Bolan in his new identity, achieved its share of striking victories. Assassinations were averted, frontal coups derailed, whole populations lifted from the bonds of servitude. The program might have forged ahead indefinitely but for traitors in the ranks, a festering malignancy within, which took the soldier and his comrades by surprise. The schism that resulted cost the life of Bolan's dearest comrades and compelled the soldier to exact a solitary vengeance of his own. Once more outside the law, he was reminded that his enemies were still the same. No matter how the names and faces changed, a savage was a savage until he was eradicated permanently from the earth.

In Vietnam he had experienced the indecision of a government that lacked the courage of its own convictions. Terminal timidity and permanent procrastination doomed the Asian effort, but a canny soldier learns from his mistakes, from the mistakes of others. Free of all extraneous controls, the Executioner reverted to a style of warfare that had served him well against the syndicate. Essentially a solitary warrior, Bolan set about reminding old enemies how it felt to die, instructing newfound adversaries in the price of pain and terror. Spirits of the friendly dead accompanied Bolan on his march across the hellgrounds, who left mayhem and destruction in his wake.

Of late, there have been cautious feelers from the government, suggestions of a second chance to make the Phoenix Project work on Bolan's terms. The dual threat of terrorists without and syndicated criminals within has brought the nation to a desperate pass, where radical solutions are demanded by a population sick to death of living beneath a pall of fear. The offer strikes a cautious but responsive chord in Bolan's mind, compelling him to calculate the odds and weigh the costs. Once burned, he knows the hazards of surrendering his independence to anonymous decisionmakers, letting others chart the course of a distinctly personal crusade. But if a measure of autonomy could be ensured...

With memories of pain and treachery still fresh in mind, Mack Bolan hesitates to put his trust in other men. A few have earned his faith; among them are the battle-hardened veterans of past campaigns who stand committed to the soldier's war as if it was their own. And in a sense it is. The Bolan war belongs to anyone who was ever set upon by evil men, compelled to live in dread of what another day might bring. The struggle lives in every heart or mind that finally rebels against the croaky status quo, proclaiming that the system must be made to work, before it dooms us all.

The soldier waits, but never idly. There are enemies and challenges on every hand, beyond the capabilities of any single man in any single lifetime. Wherever terrorists or mercenary thugs inflict their violence on the civilized, there is a job to do. Wherever men and women live with terror, there is justice to be done. Wherever precious lives are wasted, there is blood to be avenged.

The Executioner is ready, waiting, anxious to begin his war afresh. Created in the crucible of war and tempered in the flames of hell, he is a judgment of destruction visited upon the cannibals, collecting ~~in~~ their bloody debts with interest due. The words of Bolan's journal, written at the onset of his war, ring true today: "I am not their judge, I am their judgment. I am their Executioner."

And so he shall remain until his duty is fulfilled, the bloody work completed. Spinning out his life on borrowed time, the Executioner is living large and standing hard against the enemies who would destroy society. His war is here and now.

DON PENDLETON'S

MAC GYVER


THE
EXECUTIONER
100



BOLAN

NIGHT PROBE

A Short Story

The big man in black moved silently among the shadows, merging with them, making them a vague extension of himself. The suit he wore fitted him like a second skin; the flesh of his hands and face was streaked with battlefield cosmetics, rendering him virtually invisible. A Beretta 93-R autoloader nestled snugly beneath one arm in custom leather, while  Thunder, a silver .44 AutoMag, rode his hip on military webbing. Pouches at his waist held extra magazines of ammunition. Hidden pockets in the skinsuit held garrotes, stilettos and other gear essential to a warrior in the killing grounds.

This warrior was called the Executioner. The killing ground was Staten Island, and the big man's target was a large, expensive house protected from its neighbors by a lawn that covered several acres. Lights were visible in several windows, indicating warmth and sanctuary, but the warrior knew that this house was not a home.

It was a prison. And he had been dispatched to free its single inmate.

Crouching in the undergrowth, he picked a sentry out from thirty yards away. The guy was obviously a novice, dawdling along his rounds and paying more attention to his cigarette than to his surroundings. Careless yardmen had no life expectancy at all.

The Executioner closed in silently, a slim stiletto in his hand. The sentry never saw Death's shadow as it reached out to touch him from behind. One calloused hand clamped down on the mouth as steady fingers exerted pressure to stifle any outcry. A sudden jerk backward and a sharp twist exposed the jugular. Skin and flesh surrendered to finely honed steel, releasing a fountain that was inky

in the darkness. Bloody foam erupted from the lookout's severed larynx as he died, still standing, cradled in Muck Bolan's arms.

"I need you, Striker." Worry lines had etched a pattern into Hal Bragnola's face. His lips were clamped around a dead cigar. "We've got a bad one on our hands."

"Your hands," the Executioner reminded him without antagonism.

"Right, I know. But I can't handle it through channels this time. Protected witness," Hal said. "He makes Valachi look like Silent Sam."

"Sounds promising."

"It was," Bragnola said, "until somebody gave him up."

"A leak?"

"The worst. No more than half a dozen people knew the mark's location, and I would have trusted each one of them with my life. I'm double-checking now to find out which one bites the bullet."

"It's a dirty business."

"Yeah. The problem is, our witness has already disappeared. They've got him, Striker."

"Leads?"

"None worth repeating," Hal replied. "And I can't use any of my usual sources till I plug this leak for good. By that time..."

Right. By that time, it would be too late for one "protected" witness.

"Will you help me?"

"Yes."

The truck had been simplicity itself. The Executioner had bagged an underbuck for one of New York's reigning families and asked him certain questions. When the guy had balked, he asked again... more forcefully. Before he finished, Bolan was convinced that his reluctant source had spoken truthfully. And so he had.

The hardsite was on full alert, with gunners patrolling the grounds on random walking beats. The soldier covered forty yards before he met another obstacle, and there were two of them this time. They looked a lot like Mutt and Jeff, one short and stocky, his companion long and lean. Except that Mutt and Jeff had never carried riot guns in any comic strip the Executioner had ever seen.

The taller sentry carried his beneath one arm, while his sidekick had his finger on the trigger of his scattergun, eyes scanning constantly for any sign of danger. He would already have a live one in the chamber, with the safety off, and at the moment he was Bolan's greatest single threat.

The soldier eased his sleek Beretta out of shoulder rigging, thankful for the custom silencer already locked in place. The 93-R was capable of 3-round bursts, but Bolan left the fire selector switch on single shots for now. The hostile gunners were at twenty yards and closing as he eased the safety off and raised his weapon into target acquisition, sighting down the slide.

Jeff first.

Bolan stroked the trigger, and the pistol coughed politely, trucking for the second strike before his parabellum round struck home. He did not have to see its impact on the chunky torpedo's forehead to know that it was mortal. Bolan was already firing again before Mutt realized that he was alone and marked to die.

Round two ripped between the sentry's eyes, tumbling through bone and brain before it blew a fist-size exit port behind one ear. The impact hurled the guard backward, boot heels drumming briefly on the turf before his last reflexive energy ran out.

Three down. How many left to go? No master.

Bolan had a job to do, and he would see it through regardless of the odds.

"The Man would like to talk to you again," Brognola told him. "I think he wants another chance to plead his case."

"I wouldn't want to waste his time."

"He wants you back, you know that. Hell, we all do."

"It's too late."

"I don't believe that, guy."

"Believe it. It's the gospel."

"There was mention of a pardon. New security. I got the definite impression you could name the tune."

"I do that now," the Executioner reminded him.

"You can't go on like this forever."

Bolan waited, silent.

"So why not take a helping hand along the way?"

"It holds me back."

"I'd surely hate to see you die out there alone."

The soldier smiled. "Dead's dead."

He reached the main house unobserved and found a trellis that would take his weight. Behind a balcony some twenty feet above the ground, French windows were ablaze with light. It was as good a place to start as any, and they would not be prepared for an intrusion on the second floor.

He scrambled up the trellis like a giant spider, half-expecting an alarm at any moment. Painfully exposed, he knew that they could pick him off with no real effort now, and he was braced for the explosive impact of a round between his shoulder blades. A round that never came.

Bolan scaled the wrought-iron railing of the balcony and flattened against the brickwork, leaning out to catch a glimpse through filmy curtains. From his angle, he could see four men inside the room: two seated while a third paced nervously. The fourth man sat at center stage, arms bound behind him in a wooden straight-backed chair.

There might be others, Bolan knew. He couldn't see any better from his vantage point, but there was enough space inside the room for several gunners to be standing on his left just out of sight. For now his full attention was focused on the hostage, noting clotted blood in abstract patterns on his face and chest, the random burns and bruises of a rough interrogation still in progress.

They would not be keeping him alive without good reason, Bolan reasoned. The syndicate's revenge for turning government informant would be swift and permanent; Brognola's man would be a corpse by now, unless he had some information vital to the Mob.

It was not Bolan's job to analyze the guy. He had agreed to bring Brognola's pigeon out alive, if possible...and failing that, to punish his abductors in a manner their survivors would not soon forget. The New York mafiosi had been growing smug of late, secure in the knowledge that a government of laws and regulations is inherently unable to control determined renegeades. It did the soldier worlds of good to take the bastards by surprise from time to time, remind them that there was a straighter line between the pawns of crime and punishment.

If there were other guns inside the room, he would revert to instinct, training, play his cards as they were dealt. No time for end-

less speculation while he stood, exposed to any gunman on the lawn below. Already Bolan heard the numbers running in his head, the fearful countdown under way.

He eased the 93-R out of quick-draw leather, dumbled the safety off and reached out gingerly to test the French door's handle with his free hand. Locked. That left him no alternatives, and Bolan did not hesitate to wonder if the glass would rip his flesh on impact. Stepping back against the rail, he sprinted toward the double doors, half turning burly shoulders in the heartbeat prior to contact. Glass shattered, and the latch exploded with a sharp metallic sound.

Momentum carried Bolan through the doors and on into the room beyond. He landed in a shoulder roll and came up firing, conscious that there were no other gunmen in the study-cum-interrogation room. He pinned the pacing man with one round through the heart, then swiveled toward the others before they had a chance to dig for holstered hardware.

And he registered familiar faces before his parabellum crushers sheared the greater part of each away. How many times had these old men stood up to speak for charities around Manhattan, taking loans for their philanthropy? How many times had one or both been closeted with mayors and city councilmen, police commissioners, archbishops?

But no more.

He left the leaking dead for someone else to worry over, concentrating on the sole survivor now. The Beretta's silenced rounds would not be audible downstairs, but he had raised enough commotion to bring an army on the run.

He slit the captive's bonds with his stiletto, helped the groggy man to rise. The guy was still reluctant to believe his eyes, unable to imagine he might somehow have a second chance. But he was on his feet, and that was something.

"We've got to move," he told the hattered scarecrow, and he got a nod of understanding in return.

"M-my clothes . . ."

"Forget about them now. No time."

The second-story landing was deserted, but he heard the sound of footsteps on the stairs, drawing nearer as they left the study. Bolan palmed a frag grenade and freed the safety pin, already winding up the pitch before the gunmen's voices became audible.

"I'm telling ya, there's somethin' wrong."

"Slow down, for Christakes. I don't plan to harge in there—"

Sudden silence as the lethal egg fell in their midst, was marked and recognized. One of the gunmen just had time to scream before a thunderclap devoured the staircase, spraying shrapnel, bits of plaster, woodwork and some darker, wetter things.

"It's now or never," Bolan told his pale companion, and he hit the stairs without a backward glance. The guy would follow him, or die.

Ignoring twisted bodies in the stairwell, Bolan reached the ground floor, swiveling to face the housemen emerging from the dining room. Big Thunder and the 93-R erupted in unison, dispatching messages of death before the startled gunmen could respond in kind. A backward glance verified that he was not alone, and Bolan crossed the smoky parlor, homing on the wide front doors. Before he reached them, they swung inward to admit a pair of yardmen, riot guns already sweeping in search of targets.

Bolan let Big Thunder greet them, blowing them away before they had an opportunity to recognize their peril. On the wide veranda he stood ready to receive the remnants of the yard force . . . and the silent dark regarded him with cool disinterest.

He was alone.

A pair of headlights winked at Bolan from the far end of the driveway. Smiling to himself, he led the way, his frail companion close behind. They found Brognola waiting at the car.

"You found your leak," the tall man in black said. It didn't come out sounding like a question.

"Yeah. I owe you one," replied Brognola.

"Forget it."

"Sorry, no can do."

The soddier shrugged, too weary for an argument.

"I've spoken to the Man again," Hul said. "He wants you back full-time . . . but he's agreed to take whatever he can get."

Mac Bolan spent a moment gazing at the distant lights of New York City. When he spoke again, his voice was barely audible.

"I'll think about it."

And with that he sought the darkness, taking to it like a cherished friend.



No one has grabbed the reader so successfully as Don Pendleton with his hero, Mack Bolan. Pendleton began writing in 1957 while working as an air traffic controller. But it wasn't until the late sixties that he felt America was ready to meet its true hero. Now, as Bolan reaches another milestone with the publication of the *Executioner* #100: *Blood Testament*, Pendleton says, "Bolan is better and deadlier than ever."

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